

Trinity 1 2019. Mattins

I recently saw a comment on Facebook which read: “*If you think the Pope is liberal, wait till you meet Jesus*”. I thought of that as I was preparing for this morning because, of course in our second reading we hear about Jesus, once again, breaking down social and religious barriers, and generally disregarding what was enshrined in strict religious law.

The woman whom Jesus heals would have been ritually unclean, an outcast, because of her haemorrhages. Jairus, whose daughter he brings back to life, *begs* Jesus to make his little girl well. At the time it would have been astonishing for an esteemed religious leader such as him to trust another religious leader – Jesus (of all people) - who his fellow Jews were plotting to destroy. But such was Jesus’ authority and presence that he didn’t hesitate to heal both the girl who the neighbours considered already dead or the woman whom the law required to be isolated from mainstream Jewish social and religious life.

This way of interrupting one story with another (the story of the sick woman inserted into the story of Jairus; daughter) has, for obvious reasons, been called Mark’s “sandwich device”. It is intended to heighten the drama and in doing so, it heightens the challenge for Christian in every age.

So what is that challenge? Well, it all about *faith* and the strength and quality of our own. About halfway through the story of Jairus’ daughter, he is told “*your daughter is dead!*” and Jesus says: “*Do not fear, only believe*”. When Jesus says “*the child is not dead but sleeping*” we are told that the crowd laughed at him. I am sure that is mentioned in order to reinforce the difference between those with faith and those with none. And consider the faith of the woman with the flow of blood. Being ritually unclean, she makes an indirect approach to Jesus, she doesn’t want to be too obvious but believes that by just touching his cloak, she will be made well. And when she comes in front of him, his response is quite simple: “*Your faith has healed you*”.

And so, reflecting on these two miracles, we might ask ourselves about the extent of our own faith and how much we really believe that God can achieve great things today and indeed achieve great things through *us*. Not long ago, we celebrated Easter, which reminded us that God can “*make all things new*”. To what extent do we *really* believe that? To what extent do we believe that God will provide, here at Chichester Cathedral and in our daily lives? After all, it’s what we were singing about, reading about and celebrating throughout the Easter season.

And two weeks ago, we celebrated Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit. Surely, if we worship a God who communicated through a rushing mighty wind and fire, he can still surprise us, disturb us and perhaps toss the status quo “*into the wind*”. “*Do not fear, only believe*” says Jesus.

This willingness to believe that God *will* act is a theme in our first reading, as well. The story of Abraham and Sarah is now drawing to a close. Abraham’s son Isaac needs a wife from amongst his own people. And so, we have this beautiful story in which Abraham, totally reliant on God’s will, sends his servant to Nahor, where he encounters Rebecca, and everything goes to plan in a way that is almost too good to be true. No dating required at all! She sounds a lovely person doesn’t she...?

Of course, having faith and confidence in God’s providence in the way we encounter in today’s readings isn’t always easy. Indeed, it can be sorely dented, if not smashed to pieces. I am sure that we all know people whose faith has been damaged for one reason or another. The fact is that we worship a God who sometimes takes us to the brink and sometimes does not provide answers or may just be saying NO to our pleading and we don’t know why, can be very hard.

But we also need to remember that in the case of Jairus’ daughter, Jesus takes his *time* to perform the miracle, to the extent that the onlookers think he is too late, and the girl is dead.

That's the way God works...sometimes instantly, sometimes over a long period of time.

In the Cathedral of San Ruffino in Assisi there is a memorial to St Pope John Paul II, with the following quote from one of his sermons:

Non abbiate paura. Aprite il cuore a Dio”

“Do not be afraid. Open the heart to God”

By daring to do that every day, miracles can occur...

